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Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

Note verbale dated 6 July 2012 from the Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

The Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to enclose herewith the text of the Chair's summary adopted by the Conference on the Urgent Appeal for the Sahel Region that was held at Geneva on 29 June 2012 on an Egyptian initiative (see annex). In this context, Egypt affirms its readiness to contribute in any future movement by the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the African countries in the Sahel region. In this regard, the Mission would like to inform you that it has also circulated the annex to the office of the President of the General Assembly, and the office of the President of the Economic and Social Council, to be circulated as an official document of this year's substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, for consideration in the Humanitarian Affairs segment.



Annex to the note verbale dated 6 July 2012 from the Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Conference on the Urgent Appeal for the Sahel Region, held on 29 June 2012 at Geneva

Chair's summary

1. The African Group of Ambassadors, in association with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), organized the Conference on the Urgent Appeal for the Sahel Region on 29 June 2012.
2. The Conference has been the initiative of the African Group to draw more of the international community's attention to one of the most severe and complex situations.
3. All participants in the Conference agreed that the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region affects all countries in the region that are already weakened by the impact of the food crisis, owing to a severe drought cycle compounded by the current political crisis in Mali and the environment of insecurity created by rampant activism of separatist terrorist groups and drug, small arms, illicit products and human beings' trafficking networks.
4. The concerned countries in the Sahel region have stressed that, owing to the current alarming situation, and despite their limited resources, they have made considerable efforts on the political, security and financial fronts to help to mitigate the impact of this crisis throughout the region, including the hosting of a greater number of Malian and other refugees, as well as the endeavour to establish structures for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations, in coordination with the various humanitarian agencies and actors. Furthermore, several countries, including neighbouring countries to the Sahel region, have also demonstrated a high sense of solidarity with the countries of the Sahel, even before the Mali crisis, notably by providing significant humanitarian aid, in terms of food and medicine, as well as technical assistance and expertise, especially in the field of agriculture and combating the migratory locust.
5. It has been recognized that both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union have reacted fairly quickly by creating a Support and Follow-up Group on the Situation in Mali, currently endeavouring to find a political solution to the crisis in Mali, in collaboration with the United Nations, with full respect for the unity and territorial integrity of Mali. A mediation process is conducted by Burkina Faso with the objective of achieving a political resolution of the conflict. This approach would specifically focus on the root causes of the crisis in the Sahel, in particular in terms of security and development. In the same vein, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) gathered in Rabat

on 11 June 2012 and called, in their final declaration, for the adoption of a comprehensive approach of solidarity with the Sahel and for achieving regional security and sustainable development in the region, as one of the main fields of action of CEN-SAD.

6. The humanitarian agencies and actors have raised several concerns regarding the alarming humanitarian situation in both the short and long terms. FAO highlighted that food insecurity and malnutrition are permanent features of the socioeconomic situation and that the countries of the region are highly dependent on agriculture for their economic growth, employment and income generation for rural communities and for individual livelihoods. However, the agricultural sector has historically underperformed, and agricultural activities in humanitarian response plans are chronically underfunded. WHO stressed the health dimension of malnutrition, as most vulnerable people, mainly children under 5, die of medical complications. At the same time, some preventable diseases are more severe and deadly, while health systems in the Sahel region are among the weakest in the world. From its side, UNHCR displayed the dramatic situation and challenges pertaining to refugees and internally displaced persons already existing in many countries of the region that have been worsening in the light of the influx of a large number of Malians uprooted from their homes to neighbouring countries. Furthermore, access to humanitarian assistance is hampered by the volatile security environment in some parts. Also, the financial requirements to protect and assist the refugees remain very limited and will become critically stretched and stressed as more displacements occur. UNICEF has underlined the importance of shaping a better future for the children's lives, and it is, therefore, required to enable governments and communities to strengthen their capacity to protect their children through various means, including investing in basic social service provisions. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, from its side, highlighted the importance of its role in ensuring that efforts in the nine affected Sahel countries are well coordinated and that progress can be monitored. It is, therefore, the role of the newly appointed Regional Humanitarian Coordinator to support Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators to build community resilience, prioritize resources and address specific challenges such as security and access, notably through collaboration with regional organizations, peace and security stakeholders and the United Nations Office for West Africa. Also, the related appeals that were launched over the past months present a strategic approach to address needs in each individual country.

7. Most participants have recognized that the impact of this crisis may extend beyond the borders of Mali and the Sahel region, indeed constituting a genuine security threat for the entire North African region, as well as southern Europe. Hence, the need for greater media, political and financial mobilization of the international community with a view to fostering a collective, coordinated response to the various challenges lying ahead.

8. While expressing appreciation to all donors, the African Group has demonstrated the need for more efforts of these stakeholders, since the humanitarian assistance and the international attention to all aspects of the current situation turned out to be insufficient, given the magnitude of the crisis in the Sahel region on all fronts.

9. Many countries mentioned several initiatives to help the region, such as the Partnership for Resilience in the Sahel, launched by the European Commission in June 2012, the zero hunger policy launched at the United Nations Conference on

Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, and the 2007 Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Doha International Donors' Conference on Consolidating Food Self-Sufficiency in the Niger.

10. It is therefore recommended that there is a need to:

- (a) Promote greater awareness among the general public and the international community of the seriousness of the situation in the Sahel;
- (b) Support the consolidated appeals process for 1.6 billion for the Sahel region;
- (c) Mobilize more assistance by the international community along with an effective and coordinated response to the grave humanitarian situation in the Sahel;
- (d) Think beyond the current situation and support the efforts aimed at bringing the causes at the origin of this situation to an end;
- (e) Promote and build resilience at all levels, from the community up to the national and regional levels;
- (f) Pursue a twin-track approach, namely, to deliver an urgent crisis response to those severely affected by hunger right now, while at the same time investing in longer-term solutions;
- (g) Take rapid action to prevent further deterioration of the food security situation. Agriculture and livestock, like other areas, are time sensitive and, especially in this region, very seasonally dependent. It is crucial to act now to support the farmers during the ongoing lean season, and to support the preparation of the off season;
- (h) Strengthen preparedness interventions immediately to prevent unnecessary disease and death, as the rainy season is coming soon;
- (i) Support national ownership, aligning international support with existing national and regional efforts and ensuring effective coordination;
- (j) Continue building our response to boost the capacity of humanitarian actors on the ground and to make additional funding available;
- (k) Ensure that humanitarian aid and assistance reach populations in need directly. Any misuse of humanitarian assistance by non-state actors must be strongly condemned;
- (l) Maintain the funding momentum urgency to emphasize the link between humanitarian action and development programming, and to strengthen the capacity of governments to be prepared for future crisis.